

Books Abroad

● **SHAKESPEARE:** The 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, still five months away, has already produced two biographies and a Carl Dolmetsch recording of 'Music of Shakespeare's Time' for HMV. Best news so far is the Theatre Festival in London next spring: the Comédie Française (Molière); West Berlin's Schiller Theatre (Max Frisch); Peppino de Filippo of Naples (in one of his own inimitable farces); Dublin's Abbey Theatre (Sean O'Casey); the Polish Contemporary Theatre (Brecht); the Greek Arts Theatre (Aristophanes); and the Moscow Arts Theatre.

● **TEILHARD DE CHARDIN:** The task of deciding whether he was a great genius or one who happened to reflect in acceptable form the manias of his age, requires civilized scepticism: the ability to delay decision until the evidence has been thoroughly examined and digested. Among those fitted to hold opinion there seems to be fairly general agreement that his theological views are capable of unorthodox interpretation and

need to be treated with great caution. But outside this area there is wide variety of opinion, ranging from Prof. P. B. Medawar in the English philosophical journal *Mind*: "nonsense, tricked out by a variety of tedious metaphysical conceits"—to the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer who claimed that Teilhard was a great pioneer: "The pioneers cut their way through the dense undergrowth; they grope, and must be allowed their freedom to err."

● **BREVIORA: *One Fat Englishman*** by Kingsley Amis (Gollancz, London) is about an English publisher (a skunk) and the dullness of American university life. Critics agree that it is sometimes very funny. . . . Constantine FitzGibbon writing in the *London Observer* about *The Reichstag Fire* by Fritz Tobias says: "Herr Tobias fails to convince this reader that the Nazis did not know that he [van der Lubbe] was going to fire the Reichstag: more important, he has similarly failed to convince the more responsible German historians. . . ."

agonies joined: and by good fortune, in a mind as fine as a distinguished American family could generate of Josiah Royce's Harvard shape, with, at its disposal, a set of technical entrepeneurings remembered from university days. By still greater fortune, the techniques with which he had worked lent him access to a whole tradition's gamut of effects, the better to construct his shaman's echo-chamber.

The fine mind, and the technical fastidiousness, survived; if after *Fragment of an Agon* he is never again the shaman, he is still a scrupulous innovator, a moral example, a cunning craftsman. And the late poetry looks back to the earlier: it flows from, and circles round, and meditates on, his seven years as medium and ventriloquist, meditating the quasi-religious connotations of the role he had been called on to play, and the state of a world fortunate enough to have secular arts to minister to its sanity, but unaware of other dimensions of salvation.

And the *Four Quartets*, conceived when one more war was sending through the sick world one more convulsion, repeat as by confident ritual the spell, scrupulously repeating four times over the structure of *The Waste Land* with an impassioned lucidity that recollects, reprises, the import of his strangely efficacious *œuvre* and of his own, no longer abashed, relation to it.

The 75th birthday reprinting of all the poems is itself a ritual act; they are deservedly institutionalized now, so much so that apparently no one has proofread, for instance, *Dante Restaurant* since a printer last garbled its 11th line in 1925. (On the other hand, the line-count in *The Waste Land* has at last been set right.) They partake, in fact, of the life of commerce; for whoever already has the *Complete Poems and Plays* must also acquire the present volume to obtain five additional minor poems, and whoever buys this volume will still need to go elsewhere for the plays. But publishers don't play these tricks except on avid buyers. That they are playing them here is a compliment to Mr. Eliot and his readers together: certifying his status as an active classic forty years after the time of his great ministrations.

ern example of the shaman-poet, shaking with a civilization's fever and confronting its demons with his incantations. Perhaps only Baudelaire had preceded him in that dark role: a role neither man sought.

It is not hard with seeking, and there is nothing coy in Eliot's frequent disavowals of willed participation. He has compared the poet's mind (his own) to a shred of platinum, catalyzing processes into whose force it does not enter; he has spoken of the poem as a thing that possesses the poet until he can be rid of it by perfecting it. These analogies annoy young seekers who expect to be told how to be poets. They describe exactly (we must believe) a thing that happened to Eliot during seven years before 1925, after which he was never the same man again.

Some resonance, we must surmise,

between his private torsions and the agony of a Europe wondering what to do with its past underlay that strange story. It is clear that the poems, with their drowned women, broken columns, and unpersuadable eyes, tremble with private happenings we can never reconstruct, and affirm public symbols so overt we feel no need of private clues. What is that drowned woman but all that the heart of Europe has held dear and longs to repudiate; what throbs beneath those grave cadences but the collective nightmare that moved Picasso fifteen years later to the frozen hysteria of the *Guernica*? So a burning match may twist as though dancing. So Philomel, in *The Waste Land*'s own analogy, ordered the passions of men with song sprung out of her impotent effort to tell what had happened to her.

Macrocosmic and microcosmic

Copyright of National Review is the property of National Review Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.